By the Most Reverent Harold E. Sexton DD,
Sixth Bishop and First Archbishop
of the 100-Year-Old Diocese

Diocese of British Columbia

The Royal Letters Patent, which created the British Columbia diocese a c entury ago, now preserved and treasured, together with the impressive royal seal affixed by Queen Victoria.

established, the synod was formally brought into being and it met for the first time on December 16, 1875.

MENTION SHOULD BE MADE of the long journeys undertaken by Bishop Hills on the mainland of British Columbia. The story of his adventures on the Fraser River and Cariboo trails is a very interesting one, and the experiences of his clergy, Messrs. Sheepshanks, Brown, Knipe, and later Reynard, were of no commonplace character. They involved a great deal of courage, good nature and adaptability. Thus were the ministrations of the church brought to the ever-increasing number of gold prospectors and settlers over a large area.

Particular mention should be made of one of the bishop's earliest associates, the Rev. John Sheepshanks, who came to New Westminster in August, 1859, and immediately built a church which was consecrated in the following year. This building, however, was destroyed by fire in 1865, but a more permanent church dedicated to the Holy Trinity was erected, and subsequently became the first cathedral of the diocese of New Westminster. Sheepshanks was a man of vision, and anticipated the rise of a great city on Burrard Inlet. He accordingly acquired "a good large piece of land" on the inlet, making the necessary payments, and providing for slight improvements. On returning to England in 1867, Mr. Sheepshanks made over the piece of land to the bishop for the church, begging him to continue the payment of the small annual sums necessary to maintain the ownership, anticipating that the land would become of great value.

Eventually Mr. Sheepshanks became Bishop of Norwich, and in 1894 he presented his old friend Bishop Hills, who had retired from British Columbia, with the quiet benefice of Parham in Suffolk, where he died in 1895. Bishop Sheepshanks, in describing the institution of his old bishop to the living, wrote: "When he arose from kneeling before me, I said, by way of conversation, 'Well, my dear bishop, and what became of that piece of land which I gave you for the church on Burrard Inlet?' The good old man positively blushed as he said, 'If I had kept that piece of land, it would have sufficed to endow the whole diocese.' It was the very centre of the present city of Vancouver, and the bishop had apparently let it go for tax sales."

It was in 1879 that the huge diocese was subdivided by the formation of the dioceses of New Westminster and Caledonia, the endowment for each diocese having been raised by Bishop Hills in England. Further subdivision has since taken place, the dioceses of Kootenay (1900) and Cariboo (1914) being taken out of the diocese of New Westminster.

THE GREAT PIONEERING WORK of Bishop Hills ended in 1892 with his resignation of the Bishopric of British Columbia, now confined to Vancouver Island and the adjacent islands. His successors were Bishops Perrin, Roper, Scriven, Schofield and the writer of this article, and those succeeding him in the diocese of New Westminster were Bishops Sillitoe, Dart, de Pencier, Sir Francis Heathcote, and the present bishop, the Right Rev. Godfrey P. Gower.

The progress made during the years is a matter of encouragement to us today. A great cathedral has been erected in Victoria, and the extension of the church's ministrations in the mother diocese, and elsewhere in the province, has been remarkable. This is particularly the case in the diocese of New Westminster, now based on the populous and fast growing city of Vancouver, which in a space of 60 years has become the third largest in the Dominion. The diocese of Kootenay has become self-supporting, and real progress is reported from all other parts of our wide-flung province. It should be mentioned that in 1914, the five dioceses in British Columbia became an ecclesiastical province, and in 1948, the diocese of Yukon, formerly in the province of Rupert's Land, was added.

British Columbia is perhaps the fastest developing province in Canada, and communities spring up almost overnight. Under such circumstances, it can be well understood that our chief problem is that of church extension, and it is taxing our resources to the uttermost. Our next most urgent problem is the supply and training of candidates for holy orders. Our theological college, which is affiliated with the University of British Columbia, is an indispensable institution, but, under present circumstances, it cannot be expected to produce a sufficiently large number of clergy for our increasing needs.

We are grateful for the goodly tradition of bishops, priests, and people, who have handed on to us their torch of witness. Ours is a goodly heritage, and at this time, we thank God for the inheritance of the past, we pray for renewed consecration as we give ourselves to the possibilities of tomorrow.

The Centenary will be observed throughout the year, and prominent amongst the visiting speakers will be the Bishops of Durham, Chelmsford and Coventry, as well as Canon Fenton Morley of Southwark Cathedral. The celebrations will commence with a combined diocesan service in Victoria Cathedral on Tuesday, February 24, at 8 p.m., and there will be a great provincial service in Christ Church Cathedral, Vancouver, on the evening of Thursday, April 30.